

MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting participants were welcomed by Philip Shucet, Karen Rae and Roberto Fonseca.

Shucet noted that Virginia has an environmental study scoped out and has an agreement with Federal Highway to keep the regulatory process working appropriately.

Rae said that although each participant has technical responsibility in his or her own state, what is accomplished individually is much less than what can be done as a whole. She stated that together the group could leverage a significant amount of attention.

Fonseca stated that the relationship FHWA enjoys with Virginia Department of Transportation is a good one that is open and candid. The procurement process VDOT is using is different and exciting, and the potential for tolling an existing interstate is interesting. He expressed support for continued multi-state meetings.

HIGHWAY BRIEFINGS

TENNESSEE, Dennis Cooke presenting:

Although the state has no existing long-range highway plan for I-81 or any of its interstate corridors, TDOT is developing its first long-range intermodal statewide plan. The 18-month study should be completed in mid-2005 and includes a large public involvement component. It is taking a 25-year vision (2030). They have purchased data from Reebie to develop a statewide freight model.

Interstates 81 and 40 are seen as the backbone of Tennessee, with I-65, I-75 and a future I-69 as ribs.

Tennessee is bordered by eight states – more than any other state. It is a “bridge” state, meaning most freight passes through. Early public input shows that people are scared of driving with trucks, so freight will be a big driver of the long-range plan.

Of particular note: 18 Tennessee counties are non-attainment; resources are a problem, so they will be looking at innovative financing.

VIRGINIA, Fred Altizer presenting:

An environmental study is under way for all of I-81 in Virginia. The I-81 Corridor Improvement Study is being conducted by VDOT for FHWA. It is a multi-modal study and is being done in tiers. Tier 1 will help to answer broad questions such as how many lanes may be needed and whether additional rail capacity is needed. The study also is considering tolling and its potential impacts. At the end of Tier 1, provisional approval for tolling I-81 will be given by FHWA. VDOT and FHWA have a unique agreement in place specifying how this study is being conducted as well as its timeframes (Process Streamlining Agreement).

The draft Purpose and Need chapter from what will become the DEIS will be shared by VDOT with the other states early next year. Public hearings on the DEIS will be held next spring, and VDOT will advertise these meetings in surrounding states. Tier 1 should be complete in mid-2005. Tier 2 will address site-specific issues.

Virginia also has applied for the pilot tolling program under current federal transportation legislation and has received conditional provisional approval. VDOT and FHWA are working together to complete several requirements of the application process, including the development of a work-study plan and public involvement. This is a learning process for both agencies, because the application is the first of its kind.

VDOT also is using a state procurement process in its development of future I-81 improvements. The Public-Private Transportation Act of 1995 (PPTA) allows companies to offer services to state agencies. After a thorough review process, VDOT's commissioner selected a consortium called STAR Solutions to be the potential operator of I-81 improvements. Although STAR has proposed truck-separated lanes along I-81, the decision to negotiate with STAR does not mean Virginia has elected to build truck-separated lanes. The I-81 Corridor Improvement Study will be the basis for deciding what, if anything, to build in Virginia.

WEST VIRGINIA, Randy Epperly presenting:

Ten out of 26 miles of I-81 in West Virginia will be widened to three lanes in each direction. A couple of interchanges will be added. The fastest growing area is near Martinsburg. Traffic counts show 85,000-90,000 ADT with 35% trucks. West Virginia will coordinate a crossing of the Potomac River with Maryland.

Widening will be done in the medians, which are 60-120 feet wide. Existing interchanges will not be expanded. Because of this approach, a Categorical Exclusion (CE) environmental document is necessary. There are a lot of historic features and Karst terrain along the corridor. Timeframe for completion is 8-10 years.

A combination of bond money and regular federal allocations will fund the work. Special funding will be used to add an interchange at Dry Run. No tolling will be used in West Virginia.

All the states are affected by what Virginia is planning. West Virginia is fielding calls from the mid-West asking what routes can be taken through that state in order to avoid tollbooths in Virginia.

MARYLAND, Nicole Washington presenting:

Maryland has the shortest section of I-81, with 12 miles and nine interchanges. I-81 in Maryland carries 34% truck traffic, one of the highest rates in the state. An I-81 Improvement Study is underway, which includes an Environmental Assessment (EA). The Purpose and Need for the study show traffic operations and safety as important factors. The C/D section at I-70 is not sufficient. Potential cost for improvements is enormous. Information meetings have been held.

Last fall the agency began to consider toll options, so additional information meetings were held. Maryland has completed a preliminary application to FHWA for tolling. They are considering diversion analysis.

There are no state restrictions against tolling. The previous governor was on record as opposed to tolling; the current governor is in favor of using tolls for funding. Project planning is scheduled to be completed by the Fall/Winter of 2005.

PENNSYLVANIA, Walt Panko presenting:

The I-81 corridor is the third longest interstate route in Pennsylvania and carries truck traffic ranging between 18 to 33 per cent. In Pennsylvania, trucks use the I-81 corridor to travel between the Southwestern region of the U.S. to the populated Northeast region. Truck traffic increases between the Pennsylvania Turnpike and I-78 interchange. Many trucking firms and warehousing facilities are locating in the counties surrounding Harrisburg.

Rail service mainly parallels the I-81 corridor from the Maryland state line to the Harrisburg area. There are three intermodal facilities along I-81, with two of these facilities in the Harrisburg area. The I-81 corridor in Pennsylvania also connects major military facilities.

Pennsylvania's major efforts are to maintain the existing I-81 corridor, although some interchange improvements have been made in recent years. An I-81 Corridor Widening Study will be completed in the very near future and has identified the widening of 77 miles from 4 to 6 lanes from the Maryland state line to the I-78 interchange, but avoiding the 6-lane section in the Harrisburg area at an estimated cost of over \$1.5 billion. The financing of the widening improvements was not addressed in this study. Pennsylvania is not considering tolling as an option to improve I-81.

At the I-81 Multi-State Meeting, Pennsylvania expressed concern of interstate tolling. With the amount of warehousing and trucking in Pennsylvania along the I-81 corridor, tolling on various sections of I-81 could potentially impact land use and regional economic development by the diversion of truck traffic.

Mike Lapano presenting:

Pennsylvania is conducting an I-81 Widening Study, which is a planning study. It begins at the Maryland line and goes through Harrisburg, ending at the I-78 split. This is a 77-mile corridor, which is mostly four lanes, although there are six in Harrisburg. This is a mainline study only and does not include interchanges. Study year is 2030.

Near the Pennsylvania/Maryland line, I-81 carries 43,700 ADT, with trucks accounting for 35%. At Harrisburg, traffic is 30,000 vpd with 30% trucks. There have been 344 crashes in five years on the study section, which is an acceptable level; however, half of those crashes involve trucks.

Medians are 60-84 feet wide. Widening to the inside means barrier will be needed; if Pennsylvania widens I-81 to the outside, then additional right of way is needed. Most of the median is at significant grade differentiation. If they widen to the inside, then Pennsylvania will match Maryland for continuity. Estimated cost for additional lanes is \$1.5 billion. The study should wrap up this fall, and then Pennsylvania will have a master plan for I-81; possibly some projects could be added to the state's Transportation Plan Upgrade.

The study is not proposing tolls, but that doesn't mean the possibility won't be discussed at executive levels of state government.

NEW YORK, Steve Slavick presenting:

New York is in the midst of transforming its Department of Transportation to focus on multimodal transportation with emphasis on transportation corridors.

Within NYS I-81 extends for 181.6 miles between the PA border and the Canadian Border. There are no high priority projects scheduled for this corridor. High traffic locations are limited to the Binghamton and Syracuse areas, with AADTs of 72,000 and 90,000 vdp respectively. Other sections carry approximately 20,000 vpd.

Unlike the situation for other states, and New York's other interstate highways, I-81 in New York is not paralleled by a rail mainline and probably would not be an alternative to diverting traffic.

RAIL AND INTERMODAL BRIEFINGS

VIRGINIA, Karen Rae presenting:

An I-81 Marketing Study was produced for the Department of Rail and Public Transportation. Some 60-70% of the trucks in Virginia are passing through. There is double the number of trucks going north than south. Trucks make up nearly 40% of traffic on I-81, as compared to a 20% average on other interstates.

Rail upgrades alone are not the solution for increasing vehicular and truck traffic in Virginia. The study shows that if Virginia-only rail improvements were undertaken, at a cost of \$500 million, 10% of trucks in the near-term could be removed from I-81. Taking expected increases in truck traffic into account, long-term results mean that only 5% of trucks would go to rail if only Virginia improvements are made.

A multi-state rail improvement effort, costing an estimated \$2.8 billion could take more freight off of I-81, but the best results the model could produce involved a 14-state improvement plan costing \$8 billion that might remove 30% truck traffic.

Without long-term investment by all states, the rail market share of freight will decrease over time. Expected growth in traffic is going to outdo anything Virginia alone can do with rail. When speaking about I-81, it is important to guard against oversimplification by saying "rail is the only answer."

There will be a growth in trucks on highways even if rail improvements are made. The amount of truck traffic will be less if states work together on this matter.

There are policy issues that need to be addressed.

NS has sent the Commonwealth a letter stating that they are willing to participate in rail improvements.

TENNESSEE, Diane Davidson presenting:

Tennessee has a 2002 Rail Plan. There are 2,700 miles of active freight lines in the state. Tennessee rates sixth nationally in truck cargo ton/miles and first in the Southeast; 56% of truck traffic is pass-through. Rail in the I-81 corridor is in pretty good shape. East-west rail connections need to be improved. Substantial upgrades are needed, along with 53 miles of new rail.

Reebie data also is being used in Tennessee; it is helpful that several states are using the same data sources. So far, the benefit to cost ratio of rail improvements is 1:19, so that doesn't appear to be justified. Cost/benefit could improve over time; freight rail investment could be justified with increases in truck traffic and highway congestion.

The public wants Tennessee to look at other forms of travel. There is no passenger rail in Tennessee.

WEST VIRGINIA, Bill Hartman presenting:

West Virginia DOT is the only agency that operates rail as well as highways. They lease 266 miles of rail bank for trails. Nothing is being considered in the I-81 corridor because the state code doesn't allow the use of state money for rail. Federal funds or grants could be used for rail in West Virginia.

West Virginia also operates two short lines. One 52 mile line with state employees moving 4000 carloads per year and a 132 mile line with a contract operator moving freight and several tourists trains.

MARYLAND, Paul Oberle presenting:

Maryland has the smallest amount of mileage but is in the middle of the I-81 corridor, so it is important for the state to be part of corridor discussions. There shouldn't be a bottleneck in the middle of the corridor.

Similar safety concerns as expressed by the other states are felt in Maryland due to increases in total traffic volume and especially truck volumes in the past 20 years. There also is concern about economic development in the western part of the state and Appalachia. Maryland has two Class 1 rail lines, Norfolk Southern and CSX. CSX traffic is through traffic from Baltimore to the Ohio Valley. NS traffic is essentially through movements from the Southeast to Harrisburg. There is no NS intermodal facility in Hagerstown, MD. There is significant growth in warehouse distribution in the Hagerstown area.

Maryland will take additional system capacity however they can get it and as cheaply as they can do it.

The railroad companies all say they can offer additional capacity to alleviate highway congestion, but they have an aging infrastructure, and they say they can't bear the expense themselves. An infusion of public money will be needed.

Maryland is interested in working with a multi-state consortium to get a regional funding mechanism in place.

PENNSYLVANIA, Toby Fauver presenting:

There are 64 operating railroads in Pennsylvania, with short lines and four Class 1 lines. Norfolk Southern has a yard in Harrisburg, and CSX is on the I-81 corridor, too. CSX has an option on land near Chambersburg to consider for a terminal.

Challenges are the availability of crews and equipment and how far they can travel, given their service time. To go from Harrisburg to Philadelphia and back takes 12 hours; a truck can do it in 2-1/2 to 3 hours. This makes it difficult to add more traffic on the rail lines without additional improvements.

A good question to ask is, at what point is growth stifled? The conversation may not be so much about level of service as it is about the volume of traffic we are able to move in a particular corridor. There are 2,600 local municipalities, and they control land use and in the end traffic demand.

Funding for rail in Pennsylvania could come from a variety of sources including infrastructure bank, CMAQ, and the Capital Budget/Rail freight assistance funding program.

NEW YORK, Steve Slavick presenting:

As previously stated rail is not currently a likely candidate to address highway congestion on I-81. The rail system that does parallel the highway is comprised of different owners (NYSW and CSX) and serves as regional railroad between Binghamton and Syracuse, and a secondary mainline from Syracuse north. One important location served on the line is Fort Drum in the Watertown area.

Binghamton has some potential as an intermodal hub. However, a critical mass of rail traffic does not currently exist to create an intermodal terminal.

WRAP-UP, facilitated by Fred Altizer, VDOT, and Irene Rico, FHWA, Virginia Division:

Several common themes/issues were raised:

- Resources are a problem; states are interested in innovative financing
- Each state is affected by what the others are doing – this especially applies to the issue of traffic diversion
- States expect large increases in truck volume and associated warehousing
- Rail doesn't dramatically change the picture from the need for highway improvements
- States want to continue discussion and will plan to hold another meeting in Tennessee, possibly next year

LIST OF MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Tennessee

TDOT

Travis Brickey
Ed Cole
Dennis Cooke
Diane Davidson
Kim Keelor
Del Truitt

Virginia

VDOT

Fred Altizer
Laura Bullock
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Mike Finney
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